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Progress in the implementation of the Platform for Action based on the review of reports to the Commission on the Status of Women of States parties to the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women

Note by the Secretariat

Based on a recommendation of the Commission on the Status of Women and in response to General Assembly resolution 52/231, the Secretariat has the honour to transmit the report of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women on progress in the implementation of the Platform for Action based on its review of reports to the Commission at its forty-third session by States parties to the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women; the report is contained in the annex.

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Annex

Progress in the implementation of the Platform for Action based on the review of reports to the Commission on the Status of Women of States parties to the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women

Report of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women

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I. Introduction

1. The Beijing Platform for Action,[1] adopted by the Fourth World Conference on Women in September 1995, is an agenda for women's empowerment. It aims to build on and accelerate the implementation of the Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women[2] and remove all the obstacles to women's active participation in all spheres of public and private life. The Platform for Action reaffirms the fundamental principles established in the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action (A/CONF.157/24 (Part I), chap. III) that the human rights of women and the girl child are an inalienable, integral and indivisible part of universal human rights. The Platform seeks to promote and protect the full enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms of all women throughout their life cycle.

2. The Platform is directly linked to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.[3] The Convention, adopted 20 years ago on 18 December 1979, is acceded or succeeded to or ratified by 163 States parties and signed by others. The Convention sets legally binding obligations for States parties, and sets the international standard for what is meant by equality between women and men.[4] The centrality of the Convention to women's advancement and the achievement of equality is underlined in critical area I of the Platform for Action, (Human rights of women), which sets as its first strategic objective the promotion and protection of the human rights of women through the implementation of all human rights instruments, especially the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. The Platform establishes the year 2000 as the target for universal ratification of the Convention. The Platform also urges acceptance of the amendment to its article 20, paragraph 1 (see CEDAW/SP/1995/2) adopted by the States parties to the Convention on 22 May 1995, which will allow the Committee sufficient meeting time to fulfil its mandate under the Convention.[5] In order to enter into force, two thirds of the States parties to the Convention must accept the amendment; to date, it has been accepted by 21 States parties.[6]

3. The Commission on the Status of Women has the primary mandate for monitoring the implementation of the Platform for Action. However, the Platform makes clear that the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women also has an important role in this regard. Accordingly, the Platform specifically invites States parties to the Convention to include information on measures taken to implement the Platform when reporting under article 18 of the Convention in order to facilitate the Committee's effective monitoring of women's ability to enjoy the rights guaranteed by the Convention. The Committee is also tasked with taking the Platform into account when considering these reports.[7]

4. In the light of this provision of the Platform for Action, at its fifteenth session the Committee revised its guidelines with regard to the form and content of initial and periodic reports. It invited States parties to take into account the 12 critical areas of concern in chapter III of the Platform for Action in preparing their reports or in supplementary oral and/or written materials supplied in connection with reports already submitted. It also noted in its new guidelines that the 12 critical areas of concern are compatible with the articles of the Convention and therefore within the mandate of the Committee.[8]

5. Based on a recommendation of the Commission on the Status of Women at its forty-second session, the General Assembly invited the Committee to provide information on implementation of the Platform, based on its review of reports of States parties to the Convention.[9]

6. The Committee has held six sessions[10] since the adoption of the Platform for Action, and has considered the reports of 50 States parties: 13 initial reports; five combined initial and second reports; 3 combined initial, second and third reports; one second report; 11 combined second and third reports; one combined second, third and fourth reports; five third reports; eight combined third and fourth reports; one fourth report; and two reports on an exceptional basis.[11]

7. The majority of these reports had been prepared and submitted prior to the Fourth World Conference on Women, but measures to implement the Platform have been addressed by States parties in their oral presentations before the Committee and discussed by the Committee in its constructive dialogue with States parties. The Committee has also addressed implementation of the Platform in its concluding comments, in which the Committee appraises the strengths and weaknesses of States parties' implementation of the Convention, making recommendations for future action.[12] Since its eighteenth session, each of the Committee's concluding comments has included a recommendation to disseminate the Platform for Action, particularly to women's and human rights organizations.[13]

8. In its consideration of reports since the Fourth World Conference on Women, the Committee has highlighted commitments made by individual States parties at that Conference. For example, it has welcomed one State party's commitments to reduce infant and maternal mortality by 50 per cent, raise compulsory education to eight years, eradicate

female illiteracy and withdraw reservations, and commitments made by another State party to education, training, the girl child, women and law, violence against women and children and health.

9. The Committee has commended States parties on efforts to implement the Platform, noting their national action plans, of which the Secretariat has now received 105, as well as specific mechanisms put in place to implement the Platform, such as policies and plans for women's advancement or commissions, intergovernmental machineries or designated offices established to encourage implementation. Strategies to implement the Platform developed in cooperation with non-governmental organizations have been particularly welcomed, as has the inclusion of non-governmental organizations in monitoring implementation. Mention has also been made of innovative approaches to implementation. For example, the convening of national workshops to address implementation and the development of community programmes on the basis of those workshops, as well as periodic reporting to the public on the Platform have been welcomed, as have the enactment of legislation and earmarking of resources to encourage overall implementation of the Platform.

10. The Committee has noted where States parties have failed to address the Platform for Action in presenting their reports, and has sometimes suggested that plans for implementation are inadequate. It has called on States parties to describe the results of implementation of the Platform in their next periodic report required under the Convention, and has sometimes requested States parties to translate their national action plans into local languages. It has also called for the adoption of an overall plan for implementation of the Platform through specific measures and within a particular time-frame, and requested that the President and ministers be briefed on the implementation of the Platform. In one case, it has suggested that full implementation of a State party's national action plan could be impeded by prevailing religious and cultural norms.

11. The reports considered by the Committee since the adoption of the Platform for Action have presented a richly detailed picture of the situation of women worldwide. The Committee has been provided with opportunities to assess progress in the implementation of the Platform for Action and identify areas requiring further action. In addition, the Committee has made specific suggestions to accelerate implementation.[14]

II. Progress in implementation

12. Consideration of States parties' reports by the Committee has revealed that significant progress has been made in countries to establish or strengthen national machineries tasked with encouraging the advancement of women. Several States parties have created the post of Secretary of State for Women to coordinate official policies. Others have set up ministries for women's affairs, sometimes at Cabinet level; established women's offices within the Office of the Prime Minister; or assigned gender focal points in each ministry. Some States parties have created an independent government advisory service to advise government on the gender dimensions of legislation, policies and programmes or women's councils to promote and coordinate policies of equality. Women's machineries have sometimes introduced innovative mechanisms, such as gender management systems, or have had a catalytic role in ensuring the systematic inclusion of a gender perspective in new policies and programmes, including with regard to law reform.

13. Steps have been taken in some States parties to facilitate gender mainstreaming, including through the compilation of gender-specific statistics to monitor the impact of policies and programmes on girls and women, the creation of equality commissions in ministries or prime ministerial directives to focus on gender issues. One State party has earmarked a given percentage of all government budgets for women's programmes and projects.

14. In the area of human rights, provisions guaranteeing the enjoyment of human rights without discrimination on the basis of sex have been included in several Constitutions, with a number defining such discrimination. In some States parties, international treaties, including the Convention, take precedence over domestic legislation, while in others legislation has been adopted to implement the Convention. Human rights principles have been integrated into legislative reform, and legislation has been adopted that guarantees women's social and political rights. Steps to mainstream the human rights of women have included the establishment of a women's unit in the Ministry of Human Rights in one State party and through an inter-ministerial committee on human rights. Several States parties have established or strengthened the office of the ombudsperson, stressing the human rights of women in this context. Others have appointed deputy ombudspersons to deal specifically with women's human rights or appointed a women's rights commissioner to the human rights commission. Human rights teaching, including with respect to women's rights, has been introduced into the primary and secondary curricula and

tertiary curricula has also been introduced in at least one State party.

15. Several States parties have taken steps with respect to the Convention, including ratification without reservations. A number have removed reservations and committed themselves to removing further reservations. Others have indicated that they are working towards removal of reservations, including through drafting legislation. States have lodged objections to reservations by other States parties. Support for strengthening the Convention, including through the adoption of the amendment of article 20(1) and support for the draft optional protocol to the Convention, has also been welcomed by the Committee.

16. Law reform measures, implementing both the Convention and the Platform, have included the revision of personal status codes, establishment of family courts, and the adoption of family code and reform of citizenship laws. Several States parties have recognized gender-based persecution in refugee law, while provisions in immigration legislation to protect the human rights of immigrant women have also been adopted. One State party has adopted an agrarian reform law giving women the right to inherit land.

17. Several States parties have revised existing labour legislation to incorporate equality provisions, including with regard to equal pay for work of equal value, and others are considering such steps. Expanded and enterprise-subsidized child day-care facilities, the consideration of social security for homemakers and legislation on parental leave have facilitated combining work with family responsibilities. Programmes have been initiated to make female employees aware of their rights in the workplace, and provisions against sexist language in job classifications are being considered. One State party has initiated consultations on ways to measure women's unremunerated work within the national economic system, through a satellite account.

18. Implementation with regard to education has included provisions that make primary and secondary education compulsory for girls and legislation that guarantees the right of pregnant teenagers to complete their education. Affirmative action efforts have also been introduced at the university level. Human rights have been incorporated at various levels of the school curriculum, and women's studies courses have been established at some universities.

19. Efforts to address traditional stereotypes have been initiated in some States parties. These have included the development of curricula, revision of textbooks and teaching methods to eliminate gender-based prejudices from educational programmes, research on the impact of depiction of women in textbooks, and non-traditional career orientation training for girls and women. Educational programmes to raise awareness of equality and to eliminate traditional stereotypes have also been introduced, including with regard to rural women and in relation to health, including sexual health.

20. Traditional stereotypes and discrimination against women have also been addressed in the media, through television, radio and advertising, including programmes dealing with women's issues, women's participation and portrayal of women's image. Some Governments have initiated efforts to make mass media more aware of the need to eliminate sexism, including the projection of women as sex objects.

21. Significant steps have been taken to address the various forms of violence against women by States parties, with a number of States emphasizing the eradication of violence against women, including through its identification as a priority area in a national crime prevention strategy. Several States parties have ratified a regional convention relating to violence against women and legislation with regard to violence against women in the home, and criminalizing marital rape has been introduced. Some States parties have introduced legislation on specific forms of violence against women, such as sexual harassment and female genital mutilation. Innovative laws have been introduced in some States parties, including legislation making the State Treasury responsible for the payment of damages to the victims of violence, provisions shifting the burden of proof from complainants to alleged perpetrators and restraining orders.

22. States parties have established or supported services for victims of violence against women, including hotlines, counselling services, shelters and crisis centres, and emergency medical provision for victims. Measures to encourage reporting of violence, such as through primary health-care providers, have been initiated, as have strategies to ascertain the extent and causes of violence in the home. Many of these have been developed in collaboration with non-governmental organizations. Measures aimed at sensitizing the public, particularly men, to the impact of violent behaviour have been introduced, including public awareness campaigns. Training and sensitization for judiciary and law enforcement officers have been introduced. Special units to handle domestic violence complaints have been established and protocols for police officers dealing with sexual assault developed. Victim-friendly courts have also been established in some States parties.

23. Steps have been taken to address acts of violence against women allegedly perpetrated by soldiers during

peacekeeping missions in one State party, while another has promoted the role of women as peacekeepers.

24. Several States parties have introduced measures in relation to trafficking and the exploitation of prostitution, including extraterritorial legislation to facilitate prosecution of trafficking and laws to protect prostitutes.

25. In order to eliminate discrimination against women in decision-making States parties have, *inter alia*, appointed focal points in national, regional and local political decision-making bodies, appointed women to high-level posts, including in the judiciary, and nominated women as candidates for governmental advisory bodies. States parties have sought to raise public awareness and introduce women's representation, and have adopted legislation to increase political participation of women, including by amending electoral laws to ensure a specific proportion of women candidates on electoral lists and the provision of quotas for parliament and local bodies, as well as the public sector.

26. The participation of an active civil society, supported by and supportive of Government, in promoting gender-equality has been a particular feature in States parties considered by the Committee since the adoption of the Platform for Action. Civil society, including non-governmental organizations and the women's movement, has been critical in awareness-raising, lobbying and service provision.

27. Progress in implementation has also included the creation of women's agricultural cooperatives for rural women and proposals to establish a women's bank to provide credits and loans for small enterprises.

III. Challenges for implementation

28. Consideration of the reports of States parties has enabled the Committee to identify challenges to implementation of the Convention and the Platform. These have included new and emerging issues, such as the adverse economic consequences for women as a result of transition to a market economy, particularly in regard to employment, health and social services, economic recession, the impact of structural adjustment, economic restructuring and privatization, modernization, liberalization and globalization. International and regional economic arrangements have also impacted adversely on women in some States parties. The Committee has noted persisting and deepening poverty among women, particularly heads of households, sometimes as the result of the withdrawal of social assistance. Armed conflict, including terrorism, has continued to result in refugee flow and internal displacement, with women who are displaced frequently experiencing violations of their human rights and the aftermath of displacement raising complex issues in regard to repatriation.

29. Trafficking in women and the exploitation of prostitution has emerged as a serious challenge to implementation of the Convention and the Platform. Prostitutes continue to suffer as a result of discriminatory application of laws, including forced medical examinations, and the absence of mechanisms of protection and rehabilitation and health services. In addition, the feminization of migration in the absence of methods to respond to abuses experienced by migrant women has rendered migrant women susceptible to human rights violations.

30. The Committee has identified the persistence of stereotypical attitudes towards the gender roles of women and men as a critical challenge to implementation. These attitudes perpetuate traditional practices and customs prejudicial to women, such as violence against women, polygamy, forced marriage, son-preference and "honour" killings. These attitudes also create a pervasive climate of discrimination, incorporating rigid social codes that entrench stereotypical ideas relating to the role of women in the family and their participation in public life, as well as appropriate work for women. They thereby discourage women from entering public life and seeking non-traditional employment.

31. The Committee has noted the strengthening of stereotypical attitudes in several States parties as a result of economic, social and cultural changes. Values overemphasizing the traditional role of women as wives and mothers have reasserted themselves, as have those recognizing men as the breadwinner and head of the family. In some cases, strengthened stereotypes have led to the introduction of legal measures which are overprotective and detrimental to women in a market economy, as well as policies which discourage the participation of fathers in family life and child care.

32. Discriminatory laws, particularly those governing marriage, administration of marital property, divorce and the family, also persist. Several States parties continue to have laws discriminating against women in relation to nationality and penal law, particularly with regard to rape or penalties with regard to honour killings. Others maintain discriminatory laws governing ownership and inheritance of land, access to loans and credits, and health, such as those

requiring that a wife obtain her husband's consent for sterilization or abortion. In a number of States parties, women experience discrimination as a result of the coexistence of legal systems, including customary and religious laws, which usually govern private life and sometimes prevail over non-discrimination provisions in the Constitution of the general law.

33. Implementation is hampered by continuing inattention to human rights at the national level. Human rights principles, particularly the Convention, are frequently not incorporated into domestic law. In several States parties, the Constitution does not refer to equality between women and men or does not incorporate a clear definition of discrimination such as that contained in article 1 of the Convention. States parties also continue to maintain reservations to the Convention, thereby hindering its implementation and that of the Platform, with several indicating no intention to withdraw such reservations. There is also a lack of knowledge of human and legal rights, and limited human rights or legal literacy education.

34. Although significant progress towards the elimination of violence against women has occurred in many States parties, it remains an ongoing challenge to the implementation of the Platform. Several States parties fail to recognize the prevalence of violence against women, particularly that which occurs in the home or is related to tradition or custom, such as female genital mutilation. Legislation and policies in several countries are inadequate. Others have not adopted measures to sensitize the police, judiciary, health professionals and the public about violence against women. Several countries also lack programmes to support victims of violence, while in others victims of sexual assault have been subject to insensitive treatment.

35. Challenges to implementation persist in the context of health, particularly reproductive health, where in some States parties services are at risk as a result of government financial constraints. Preventable diseases and unequal access to health care persists, particularly among rural and other disadvantaged sectors. Maternal and infant mortality is high in several States parties, particularly as a result of unattended births and the absence of safe and legal abortion. Lack of provision of sufficient family planning information, particularly to rural women and adolescents, and the requirement of spousal consent for contraception or sterilization, as well as costs related to contraception, sometimes as a result of privatization of health-care services, have led to high levels of abortion. Criminalization of and restrictive laws governing abortion in some States parties have resulted in a high number of clandestine abortions in unsafe conditions.

36. In several States parties, abortion is resorted to as a method of family planning. In others, coercion has occurred in the context of family planning programmes. Although many States parties lack data and information on the prevalence of human immunodeficiency virus/acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (HIV/AIDS) and sex-disaggregated data in this regard, the Committee has noted the high rate of HIV infection among young women and risk of transmission through breastfeeding in several States parties, and has drawn attention to the limited programmes available to address HIV/AIDS among women in many States parties.

37. The Committee has observed that implementation of the Platform for Action with respect to women's economic empowerment has been slow. In some States parties, women's economic activity has declined and they are overrepresented among the unemployed, with a large number of young women looking for first jobs. When employed, women are more likely to be found in part-time employment, temporary and insecure jobs, including in the informal sector. In several States parties, there is a high number of self-employed and women domestic/household workers who have limited labour relations and social security protection.

38. Stereotyping and overprotective labour legislation restrict women's economic opportunities, and women are clustered in occupations substantially less rewarding than occupations where men typically work. Educated women have a low level of occupational achievement, and women are concentrated in the lower-paid service sector with few pursuing technical careers. In several States parties, there are a low number of women in managerial posts, particularly in the private sector, while in others there is low participation by women in academe, particularly research. Wide differentials exist between the wages of women and men for equal work or work of equal value, with women receiving lower wages and having unequal access to work-related benefits, including health benefits, retirement pensions and leave. Inequalities persist in recruitment, and women are more vulnerable to lay-off than men.

39. Legislation governing employment continues to provide inadequate protection for women in a number of States parties, while in others the Government fails to ensure compliance with existing provisions with regard to minimum wage levels, work-related benefits and conditions of work. Absence of paid maternity-leave provision, and absence of, limited or inadequate child-care facilities have an adverse impact on women's capacity to combine work and family responsibilities, and accordingly continue to affect their ability to work, employment status, pay and promotion opportunities. In several States parties, affirmative action

and temporary special measures have been misunderstood and envisioned as protective measures. Strategies to enable or encourage women and men to share parental responsibilities have not been introduced. Few States parties have taken steps to assess the economic value of unpaid work.

40. Progress in implementation has also been slow in the area of education. Female illiteracy, particularly among rural and indigenous women, is a significant problem in many States parties. Stereotypical attitudes continue to result in large drop-out rates for girls at primary and secondary levels of education and failure to enrol in tertiary education. These trends are more pronounced in the rural sector and among minority and indigenous populations. In several States parties, pregnancy results in expulsion from school, while in others there is no support to allow pregnant girls to finish their education.

41. Female students are typically clustered in certain disciplines at all levels of education, and there is a reluctance to direct girls to scientific and technical fields of study. In several States parties, schools have been established for female students, which teach "household management" and other typically "female" skills, while certain schools admit only boys because of their physical abilities.

42. The Committee has noted that limited progress has been made in the area of women and decision-making. Representation in political and public life, including the legislature, policy-making and administrative positions in public and private-sector employment, trade unions, the judiciary and the military is low. Women are particularly poorly represented at higher decision-making levels. In some States parties, the representation of women in politics has fallen despite measures in this regard. In others, the removal of quotas by political parties has reduced the number of women in decision-making positions. The Committee is particularly concerned that States parties have made insufficient use of temporary special measures to increase the participation of women in this sector, and has also noted that there has been insufficient networking between women's machinery and women in decision-making.

43. Consideration of States parties reports indicates that rural women continue to experience discrimination in many contexts. They have fewer employment opportunities, and many work in family enterprises, work which is not recognized in the formal economy. Rural women suffer more as a result of prevailing negative attitudes and discriminatory practices, and are vulnerable with regard to basic health protection, including family planning. Rural women are disadvantaged in terms of education and literacy, and have less access to legal literacy programmes. In several States parties, rural women are unable to own land and are unable to participate in land reform programmes. They are also affected disproportionately by the application of discriminatory customary laws, particularly with regard to inheritance and land ownership.

44. Although many States parties have introduced national machineries to promote women's advancement, in several States parties there is no national machinery or an ineffective national machinery, with limited human and financial resources. In several States parties, the national machinery has no effective authority or an advisory or coordinating role only.

45. The Committee has noted that lack of data disaggregated by sex and gender sensitive information are obstacles to the implementation of both the Convention and the Platform. Gender-sensitive data is unavailable in particular sectors, including employment and health, violence against women, HIV/AIDS, political participation and prostitution.

IV. Towards accelerated implementation

46. Review of reports since the Fourth World Conference on Women has allowed the Committee to make specific recommendations towards accelerated implementation of the Platform for Action.

47. It has particularly stressed the value of **temporary special measures** aimed at accelerating de facto equality between women and men envisaged under article 4.1 of the Convention. The introduction of such measures has been recommended in the context of political and public life, with the Committee frequently calling on States parties to implement or maintain temporary special measures, with numerical goals and quantitative targets and timetables to accelerate de facto equality with regard to political participation and decision-making positions. The Committee has also suggested the introduction of **measures of affirmative action**, such as quotas with respect to all governmental and governmentally appointed bodies, particularly those dealing with business and economic matters, to ensure equal participation of women.

48. Temporary special measures and programmes have also been recommended in the context of education and training, where the Committee has recommended the use of gender-specific temporary measures with numerical goals and timetables to encourage women to enter diverse

disciplines, and to avoid clustering of girls and women in certain traditional disciplines in schools and universities. Where temporary special measures, including quotas, have been introduced, the Committee has emphasized the importance of the evaluation of their impact. In particular, it has suggested that the advantages and disadvantages of different electoral systems for representation of women be examined. Programmes to support temporary special measures and the beneficiaries of these measures have also been recommended. Thus, the Committee has encouraged training programmes for women political leaders to encourage participation of women in decision-making and raise public awareness about women leaders.

49. The Committee has identified **law reform** as a critical element of implementation of the Convention of the Platform for Action. It has called for the review of customary and other laws to determine compatibility with international conventions and national legislation, and for the incorporation of the principles of equality and non-discrimination between women and men, as envisaged in article 1 of the Convention, into national Constitutions and other legislation, including with regard to employment. Specific legislative reforms have also been recommended, including with regard to the advancement of women's reproductive and sexual rights, and family law, including registration of customary marriages, ensuring that women have the right to a free choice of husband and equal guardianship rights. The codification and secularization of customary laws have been suggested, as well as law reforms with respect to land ownership, especially with regard to land ownership and inheritance. The review of civil, nationality and labour codes to bring them into conformity with the Convention has been emphasized. Specific legal provisions allowing the continued practice of honour killings and polygamy have also been targeted as requiring repeal.

50. **Measures to address stereotypical attitudes** are also regarded as crucial to ensure implementation. The Committee has encouraged States parties to take account of evolving interpretation of religious texts to give necessary impetus to the improvement of the status of women and to change attitudes. It has also called for the introduction and strengthening of programmes to combat sexist prejudices and stereotyping. The media and advertising sectors have been targeted in this regard. The Committee has called for an increase in the numbers of women in the media, and has encouraged the media to promote a positive image of women as individuals and independent actors in public media campaigns. The establishment of formal complaints procedures, including sanctions for offending media and advertising agents, have also been suggested. States parties have also been called on to ensure that women's groups participate in the formulation of regulatory codes of practice for the media. The review and modification of school curricula, books and teaching materials has also been a priority concern of the Committee.

51. The Committee has emphasized the role of **human rights education**, and has urged that education in women's rights, including the Convention, should be provided in schools, universities, women's associations and non-governmental organizations. It has stressed the importance of education in women's and children's rights for specific professional groups, including the judiciary, judges, lawyers, journalists, health professionals and teachers. General public awareness campaigns with regard to women's rights, particularly directed at women, have also been recommended.

52. The Committee has underlined the importance of the availability of **data disaggregated by sex** as a basis for policy formulation and the implementation of the Convention and the Platform. It urges States parties to undertake or improve measures to collect statistical information in social and economic fields, particularly with respect to the most vulnerable women, including minority refugee and migrant women, rural women, women with disabilities and ageing women. Statistics disaggregated by sex are especially desirable in the areas of health, education, employment, prostitution and violence. In addition to data disaggregated by sex, the Committee has stressed the importance of gender-sensitive research and analysis, particularly on women in the labour market, and on the effect of transition on women.

53. The **creation of high-level national machinery** with adequate financial and human resources responsible for defining and coordinating a policy for the advancement of women is regarded by the Committee as crucial for implementation. Where States parties have existing national machinery, the Committee has frequently requested that its status be upgraded and its decision-making capacity enhanced.

54. Specific **measures towards the implementation of gender equality in employment** recommended by the Committee include the provision of skills training, retraining and credit facilities to provide employment opportunities or self-employment for workers. It has recommended the exploration of methodologies to close the gap in pay between women and men and to ensure equal pay for work with equal value. Evaluation of the impact of labour relations legislation is identified as a priority in order to assess its impact on workers with family responsibilities, the

availability of benefits and maternity leave, and whether particular legislative approaches lead to an increase or decrease in part-time or casual work. Monitoring of compliance with labour laws, particularly in specific settings, such as factories, is emphasized, and strong action is urged against employers who discriminate against women, especially on the basis of pregnancy or maternity. The introduction of paid parental leave, which should be extended to the private as well as the public sectors, is considered by the Committee to be a critical element in the achievement of equality in employment. Similarly, access to affordable, quality child care is essential, especially for pre-school children. In this regard, it advocates that women and men should be educated towards a culture of shared obligations and responsibilities of family work and the rearing of children. Consistent with the Platform for Action, the Committee has recommended the inclusion of the value of women's unremunerated work, including in rural enterprises, into national accounts, by way of satellite accounts.

55. **Poverty eradication strategies should be gender-sensitive and a gender perspective mainstreamed in poverty eradication efforts and measures.** In this regard, the Committee has highlighted the importance of considering women heads of households with a view to developing policies which will allow their socio-economic situation to be strengthened and will prevent poverty. In this context, the Committee has recommended the introduction of training programmes aimed at increasing opportunities for women to make use of micro-credit, as well as programmes to train women with regard to access to credit and loans. The specific vulnerabilities of rural women are recognized by the Committee in this context, as well as the need to establish special measures to increase their access to credit, including through special banks and self-sufficiency programmes.

56. **The introduction or enhancement of multifaceted and coordinated measures to address the various forms of violence against women** has been repeatedly stressed by the Committee. It has called for specific legislation measures and law reform, and the introduction or strengthening of support services for victims of violence. Measures to ensure that the dynamics of violence against women are understood by professional groups, including law enforcement personnel, judges, sexual and reproductive health and health workers, have been stressed, as have the introduction of adequately resourced support services, such as hotlines, shelters, safe houses and crisis centres, and victim support centres with medical, psychological and emotional support.

57. Awareness-raising campaigns aimed at increasing public sensitivity to the vulnerabilities of women to violence and to encourage public discussion of violence against women have been identified as crucial in a comprehensive strategy to reduce violence. Research and data collection, particularly with regard to vulnerable groups, such as minority, immigrant and rural women, have been stressed, as well as the study of the impact of specific legislation on reducing violence. Specific legislative changes, including the criminalization of marital rape, ensuring that secular courts have sole jurisdiction in cases of sexual violence, giving victims privacy and protection during court proceedings, facilitation of prosecution of domestic violence and increasing penalties for sexual crimes, are also recommended. Specific suggestions concerning the elimination of violence against women in armed conflict have included the establishment of a witness protection unit in courts and tribunals, ensuring that women serve as judges in such courts and the training of human rights field operations with regard to gender issues. As a long-term strategy to eliminate violent conduct, the Committee has urged the incorporation of non-violent forms of conflict resolution in education and the media.

58. In the context of **trafficking in women and the exploitation of prostitution, the Committee has urged review and amendment of legislation which discourages prostitution and trafficking and the introduction of legislative measures to ensure prosecution of criminal offenders, as well as mechanisms to rehabilitate victims through education, training and support.** In particular, the strengthening of agencies that provide information and support services to women before they depart for overseas work, as well as in receiving countries, has been stressed, as have been public information campaigns for vulnerable women to alert them to dangers when seeking work abroad. Measures to sensitize police, border officials and non-governmental organizations and to undertake research into trafficking and the use of the Internet in exploitation have been encouraged. The Committee has urged the formulation of bilateral and multilateral agreements to reduce and eradicate traffic in women and protect women migrant workers, including domestic workers, from sexual exploitation.

59. In order to achieve equality in the field of **health,** the Committee has urged the close monitoring of the impact of the privatization of social services on health care for women. It has recommended the review of laws containing punitive measures relating to abortion and other laws concerning sexual and reproductive health. It has urged the introduction of gender-sensitive reproductive and sexual health education, information and counselling, and the integration of reproductive and sexual health services, including family

planning, into primary health care. Training for health personnel with regard to women's rights, including the right to freely and without coercion choose methods of contraception, is also advocated. Measures to ensure accessibility to affordable and safe contraception, particularly for poor and rural women, are also recommended. Intensive programmes to combat the spread of HIV/AIDS, including information, particularly aimed at young girls and boys and women in prostitution, are regarded as critical by the Committee.

Notes

[1] *Report of the Fourth World Conference on Women, Beijing, 4–15 September 1995* (United Nations publication, Sales No. 96.IV.13), chap. I, resolution 1, annex II.

[2] *Report of the World Conference to Review and Appraise the Achievements of the United Nations Decade for Women: Equality, Development and Peace, Nairobi, 15–26 July 1985* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.85.IV.10), chap. I, sect. A.

[3] General Assembly resolution 34/180, annex.

[4] See *Report of the Fourth World Conference on Women ...*, chap. I, resolution 1, annex II, para. 25.

[5] The General Assembly noted the amendment with approval in its resolution 50/202.

[6] Australia, Brazil, Canada, Chile, Denmark, Finland, France, Italy, Liechtenstein, Madagascar, Malta, Mexico, Mongolia, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, the Republic of Korea, Panama, Sweden, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

[7] See *Report of the Fourth World Conference on Women ...*, paras. 322 and 323.

[8] See *Official Records of the General Assembly, Fifty-first Session, Supplement No. 38* (A/51/38), para. 335; for a discussion of the implications of the results of the Fourth World Conference on Women for the Committee, see paras. 367–373.

[9] See Assembly resolution 52/231 of 4 June 1998.

[10] In its resolution 51/68 of 12 December 1996, the General Assembly authorized the Committee to meet annually for two three-week sessions, each preceded by a pre-session working group meeting.

[11] Initial reports: Morocco, Slovenia (sixteenth session), Armenia, Namibia (seventeenth session), Azerbaijan, Croatia, Zimbabwe, Czech Republic (eighteenth session), Slovakia, South Africa (nineteenth session); Algeria, Kyrgyzstan, Liechtenstein (twentieth session); combined initial and second reports: Cyprus, Iceland, Paraguay (fifteenth session), Israel, Luxembourg (seventeenth session); combined initial, second and third reports: Ethiopia (fifteenth session), Saint Vincent and the Grenadines (sixteenth session), Antigua and Barbuda (seventeenth session); second report: Belgium (fifteenth session); combined second and third reports: Cuba (fifteenth session), Turkey (sixteenth session), Argentina, Italy (seventeenth session), Bulgaria, Indonesia (eighteenth session), Nigeria, Panama, United Republic of Tanzania (nineteenth session), Greece, Thailand (twentieth session); combined second, third and fourth reports: Dominican Republic (eighteenth session); third periodic reports: Hungary, Ukraine (fifteenth session), Venezuela, Denmark (sixteenth session), Australia (seventeenth session); combined third and fourth reports: Philippines, Canada (sixteenth session), Bangladesh (seventeenth session), Mexico (eighteenth session), New Zealand, Peru, Republic of Korea (nineteenth session) China (twentieth session); fourth reports: Colombia (twentieth session); reports submitted on an exceptional basis: Rwanda (fifteenth session), Zaire (sixteenth session).

[12] See *Official Records of the General Assembly, Forty-ninth Session, Supplement No. 38* (A/49/38), paras. 812–816; and ibid., *Fifty-third Session, Supplement No. 38* (A/53/38/Rev.1), part II, para. 397.

[13] See, for example, the concluding comments with regard to Azerbaijan in ibid., part I, para. 79.

[14] The present report is based on a comprehensive analysis of the Committee's concluding comments on reports of States parties which were considered during its fifteenth, sixteenth, seventeenth, eighteenth, nineteenth and twentieth sessions; identification of the States parties referred to throughout the report is available in the Division for the Advancement of Women, on request.